

## THE EASTERN BUDDHIST

it would be preferable to discard the word “meditation” as an English equivalent for *kusū*. Terms such as “pondering,” “seeking,” or “conveying” might be used temporarily for it, but none of them is really sufficient. Perhaps the best answer would be to leave it untranslated, as is the case with the word koan.

One often hears that band of blind, bald fools, that can't tell a jewel from a stone, say things like: “Our very mind is itself the Buddha. What is there to do after we have finished our koan study? . . .” (p. 62)

In this passage, the sentence “What is there to do after we have finished our koan study?” means something entirely different: “Is there any use finishing the koan exercise?”

The introduction to the translation, “Hakuin and Rinzai Zen,” should prove helpful for a historical understanding of Hakuin and his place in the history of Japanese Rinzai Zen. If, however, Dr. Yampolsky had given closer attention to the characteristic features of Hakuin's Zen, perhaps even in comparison with such masters as Dōgen and Bankei, I think it would have been even more helpful to readers.

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**THE WHEEL OF LIFE:** The Autobiography of a Western Buddhist. By John Blofeld. Second Edition. Shambala Publications, Inc.: Berkeley, Cal., 1972, 291 pp.

John Blofeld's *The Wheel of Life* is an autobiographical study of one man's search—physically and spiritually—into the world of Buddhism. The first edition of this work appeared in 1959 and in response to an increasing Western interest in Asia has been reprinted with the addition of two new chapters: “The Ox-Drawn Spacecraft” and “Three Grand Lamas.” Blofeld's quest led him throughout most of Asia—into China, Southeast Asia, Japan, India and her bordering regions—in pursuit of his own religious growth as a Western convert to the faith.

From his late arrival at his first Buddhist initiation (“as unobtrusively as possible, I crawled to a vacant space in the last row of almost motionless, white-gowned figures,” p. 53), to his chase up a hillside in curious pursuit of a young child (“no ordinary village girl, no daughter of the black-clad peasants of Lantau,” p. 65), to his remembrance of the Rimpoché's feeding him a dumpling after his final initiation (“I do not think I have ever in my life seen a lovelier sight than

## BOOK REVIEWS

the smile on the face of the Rimpoché when he pressed the thirteenth and last of my lion's share of the dumplings into my mouth," p. 252), Blofeld relates his life to the reader with an almost child-like quality. It is this naïvete which does not deteriorate into romanticism that renders *The Wheel of Life* so very readable and enjoyable. Religious quest and travelogue have been well balanced.

While Blofeld himself claims his final initiation experience at Tashiding in the borderlands of Tibet as the "high point" of his life, it is his traveller's and devotee's accounts of southern China which emerge as most valuable to the reader. In Blofeld's simple and modest renderings of his everyday encounters, Chinese Buddhism is revealed as being manifestly Chinese. His approach prevents historical and technical details from obscuring the national flavor added to the Buddhist teachings. For example, when Blofeld as a young man inquired of a Chinese friend as to whether the Buddha did or did not give all his teachings, the response recorded is:

Surely the Lord Buddha kept nothing back. We all know that, Little Brother. But do you suppose that he taught *all* things to *all* his disciples? Does any profound scholar, a member of the Hanlin Academy for example, prate to children of the inner meanings of things? To do so would be to sully his jade wisdom, for to the children it would sound like the braying of mules. (p. 50)

To have the doctrine of two levels of teaching explained in Chinese terms, heavily endowed not only with Chinese symbols (e.g. in this excerpt, "jade"), but also with elements of Confucianism (the Hanlin Academy) is a unique detail—yet representative of the insights Blofeld's volume yields.

There are points in the continuance of Blofeld's life and travels, however, which are not transmitted to the reader in the same insightful manner as his China origins. Chapter Ten concentrates on a journey ("The Great Pilgrimage") made by Blofeld to the sacred spots of Buddhism at the 2500th anniversary of the Buddha's parinirvana. Perhaps it was due in part to the sincerity and depth of the experiences felt by the author and thus Blofeld experienced difficulty in sharing these experiences, but the significance of this pilgrimage as expressed by him ("It is hard for a Buddhist to contemplate this scene . . . without weeping." p. 233) is never fully understood by the reader. His account of his experiences in a Zen Monastery in Japan are also a disappointment to the reader—an incident related almost apologetically and with what seems to have been little involvement. The material one expects to encounter in this chapter is there (daily routine, methods of Zen training, etc.), but they are recorded in what is

almost a purely academic manner. The *spirit* of Zen has been neglected. Blofeld seems to have been a participant in form only.

On the other hand, the two newly added chapters are an excellent addition to the original text. Concerned with Blofeld's further reflections upon his Buddhist experiences and the continuing influence that they have had on his life, his remarks reflect the seriousness of purpose with which he began his search for spiritual insight. Expressing a concern that the necessity for such seriousness will not be appreciated by his current audience, Blofeld is at great pains to make clear that the achievement of Buddhist goals is extremely difficult, both physically and psychologically, and warns that the process is an extremely slow one. In an age when many people seek instant fulfillment and the appearance of recent volumes of various sources appear to pander to this market, Blofeld's warnings that it is not an easily undertaken or sustained path (and that, for example, drugs will not serve as a substitute for orthodox Buddhist practices) is most timely. With a true Chinese understanding, Blofeld has properly understood the Confucian maxim: "The superior man understands what is right; the inferior man understands what will sell."

With these precautions, Blofeld has provided us with a viable model for Westerners seeking to adopt Buddhist precepts. This second edition is a refreshing reappearance of an older favorite work—refreshing in that travel and personal quest *are* well-balanced; refreshing in having Buddhism portrayed as a dynamic religion rather than as a "science"; refreshing in that while written enthusiastically and positively, it is not uncritical.

Blofeld modestly, almost apologetically, sums up the results of his own search and achievements on the last page of his last chapter:

It is virtually certain now that Enlightenment is not for me in this life, but this is not for want of kindly teachers or generous encouragements. The enemy is Dragon Sloth, who owes his stature to the gargantuan meals provided by my evil karma in this and many former lives. I do not despair. (p. 286)

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